THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, RECOMMENDED IN A Letter to his Pupils.

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"THE GOOD ALONE CAN HAPPINESS ENJOY."

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY NAHUM MOWER,
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1807.

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Dedication.

To Mr. Andrew Stuart, and Mr. James Cartwright, Students at Law, the following Letter is inſcribed as a mark of eſteem,

By their ſincere Friend,

JOHN STRACHAN.

ADVERTISEMENT.

This Letter with a few verbal alterations forms the laſt of a courſe of Lectures, which the Author has drawn up for the uſe of his Scholars—Should this ſpecimen be favorably received, he may be induced at ſome future period to publiſh the whole. In peruſing this little work the critical reader will recollect, that it is a kind of recapitulation, and therefore allows more abrupt tranſitions and a greater rapidity of ſtyle than uſual.—The ſentiments muſt ſpeak for themſelves.

MR. STRACHAN'S
LETTER TO HIS PUPILS.

.....

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

YOUR love of virtue, and of truth, the education you have already received, and your excellent natural diſpoſitions are ſo many pledges to me that you will always in your practice and opinions remain the ſteady friends of ſound morals, and of true religion. The enemies of the Goſpel by applying to the vanity of men, and rendering irreligion faſhionable have lately gained thouſands of proſelytes, who with all the zeal of new converts are perpetually obtruding upon you, their blaſphemy, and their doubts. They are eager to tell you there is no God, no future retribution or moral diſtinction, and puffed up with a few ſlender arguments got by rote they ſuppoſe themſelves qualified to decide on all thoſe important points which ennoble religion, and conſtitute her eſſence.

With ſhallow men the faſhion is every thing, whether in their mode of dreſs or of thinking. On this principle we account for thoſe furious enthuſiaſts of the preſent day for undefined liberty and unreſtrained licentiouſneſs: a few centuries ago they would have been the murderers of the Albigenſes, and the promoters of the cruſades. It

was reſerved for them to exhibit in this enlightened age the aſtoniſhing Phœnomenon of men preaching humanity, liberality, and toleration, while they are perſecuting with violence, not for believing too much, but becauſe ſome men ſtill preſume to believe in demonſtration, and for fear of retaining any portion of Chriſtianity, theſe enthuſiaſts have not only rejected its doctrines, but the moderation, the charity, the piety it enjoins.

Let me warn you not to be ſurpriſed though you meet with many in ſociety who deſpiſe and ridicule Chriſtianity, the pureſt, and moſt ſublime of all religions. Perſons of vicious and corrupt habits feel little anxiety to examine its evidence. They are not much diſpoſed to liſten to doctrines which reſtrain their wicked propenſities, and make them diſſatisfied with themſelves. Such people are not all equally wicked, but they are all dangerous companions, and ſhould always be avoided as the determined enemies of your moſt precious intereſts. You will find them in general incapable of raiſing their thoughts to the contemplation of the Author of nature. Their minds are ſo debaſed, and their faculties ſo obtuſe that they feel not the force of arguments in favor of religious truth, nor can they perceive the beauty and the excellence of the morality which the Goſpel inculcates. Yet they will dare to ſneer and laugh at ſerious things, and utter terrible blaſphemies without underſtanding them.

If you meet with a few unbelievers of greater abilities, and more improved intellects, you will find them proſtituting their talents in the cauſe of vice, and induſtriouſly collecting jeſts and ſophiſms againſt religion which they are careful to repeat in the ears of the young and inexperienced, to draw them from the truth. They know that with young and uncultivated minds, ridicule has frequently more weight than the ſtrongeſt arguments. Beſides to argue correctly is beyond their ſtrength, and againſt their inclinations.

But though you meet with ſome of theſe profane jeſters well ſupplied with puzzling queſtions which they propoſe with an impoſing air of liberality, and affect much candour and ſincerity, be not deceived by their falſe pretences, and never let the ſuppoſition enter your mind, that religion is not true becauſe you are unable to anſwer their queſtions. For it does not follow that the proofs of religion are weak, or that their objections are ſtrong, becauſe you may not be able to refute them. You never conclude when you cannot anſwer a difficult queſtion in Arithmetic, that nobody can anſwer it, on the contrary you juſtly ſuppoſe that to others more advanced it is eaſy of ſolution. In the ſame way when one of theſe difficulties concerning religion is propoſed, you ſhould reflect that though you may be unable to ſolve it, people who have been at more pains eaſily may, or that it is captious and of no import-

ance. But that you may be more able to detect them, obſerve how theſe ſceptics proceed.

It generally happens that their firſt ſtep to ſap the foundation of religion in the minds of the young, is to calumniate it's teachers and adherents as a ſet of dangerous men, directed by deceit or blinded with ſuperſtition, to whom no principles belong but intolerance, bigotry, and narrowneſs of mind. Theſe bold aſſertions, and ſpecious invectives, although at firſt deſpiſed, begin at laſt to be credited. We hear the calumny ſo often united with it's object, that the mention of the one almoſt mechanically introduces the other, and we are betrayed into dangerous prejudices, rather by a principle of aſſociation, than a deciſion of the judgment. If you love candour, freedom of diſcuſſion, truth and univerſal benevolence; if you deſire an exemption from prejudice and advancement in real mental improvement; join yourſelves to us, ſay modern ſceptics, for we only poſſeſs them. The unſuſpecting youth look up to them with admiration, and implicitly believe their aſſertions, for not able ſteadily to examine the juſtice of their profeſſions or their imputations againſt religion, they are faſcinated with the appearance of generoſity and hating the artifice and baſeneſs, with which their new friends tell them religion is defended, they become aſhamed of believing it, and long to be numbered among thoſe conſpicuous for liberality of ſentiment and freedom of reſearch.

Think not however, that, in pleading the cauſe of religion, I defend the conduct of all its profeſſors. They have been guilty of much wickedneſs, and with many of them bigotry and ſuperſtition have ſtill an aſylum; but I contend that theſe have nothing to do with religion herſelf. Let any one prove that the doctrines of the Goſpel neceſſarily tend to narrowneſs of mind, perſecuting zeal, or gloomy ſuperſtition, and I ſhall be among the firſt to deſert her cauſe.

All the gifts of heaven are liable to corruption. With greater propriety might we deſpiſe reaſon, becauſe it frequently directs us wrong; or reject many of the greateſt comforts of life becauſe under certain aſpects they appear evil. Why ſhould we be always told of the oppreſſions of churchmen during the middle ages? It can have no ·ght at preſent, ſince no perſon can deny that they are now for the moſt part above artifice, and ſtrangers to bigotry, conſpicuous for their liberality, their moderation, their love of truth, and their charity. Surely, againſt ſuch men the evidence of people ought not to be received without much allowance, who with moderation on their lips, perſecute with unrelenting cruelty, are bigoted amidſt their liberality, and furious amidſt their toleration, and while they are ſo anxious to pull down Chriſtianity, know of nothing to ſubſtitute in its room. The fine ſpun theories of the Metaphyſician are

forgotten by himſelf in active life, and over mankind they can never acquire any influence.

I mentioned ſome time ago my intention of tranſmitting you my ſentiments on religion; it is now proper that a ſubject of ſuch ineſtimable importance ſhould occupy ſome of your thoughts. For you to examine the evidences of Chriſtianity, is at preſent impoſſible, on account of your youth and other avocations, take then the reſult of my inquiry, ſometimes nearly in the words of my author, till your underſtanding ripen and a time of leiſure arrive. I ſhall not hinder you from ſtating and refuting objections; but obſerve here in general, that I will not make a ſingle aſſertion, which I am not ready if required, to prove to your ſatisfaction.

There is, however, one objection that I wiſh to notice, which, as it meets us in the very threſhold of our inquiry, ſeems to demand ſome examination. It has much influence with many, and prevents them from ever examining this intereſting ſubject—Religion is ſaid to exclude her friends from all the enjoyments of life. Never was there a greater calumny than this. Who have ſo great reaſon to be pleaſed and cheerful as thoſe who are conſcious of doing their duty, and are enlightened by religious truths? Is any one ignorant that the moſt exquiſite pleaſures flow from the exerciſe of the virtues, pleaſures infinitely ſuperior to any that the wicked ever enjoy.

No my friends, religion will debar you from no innocent gratifications, ſhe condemns not all kinds of pleaſures, ſhe only diſtinguiſhes the lawful from the ſpurious. She points out which may be enjoyed without danger and the pernicious effects which attend the reſt, "I am anxious for your happineſs, ſhe ſays to her friends, and earneſtly deſire to guard you from deception—pleaſures at firſt always produce agreeable ſenſations, but they are not always lawful. They are not always conſiſtent with the dignity of human nature, or the purity of the heart, many are deſtructive both to body and mind, and even the innocent, by too frequent indulgence, change into pain, or occupy that time which might have been more uſefully employed. I debar you from no pleaſures that really contribute to your felicity. If I warn you againſt thoſe of a ſenſual kind, it is becauſe they are commonly pernicious, and are forever promiſing more than they can perform. And if I tell you to uſe innocent pleaſures with moderation, it is becauſe their exceſs produces diſguſt. Inſtead of contracting, I will enlarge and elevate the circle of your pleaſures, and preſent ſources of enjoyment infinitely ſuperiour to thoſe of ſenſe. I begin with correcting all the diſorders which the paſſions and appetites may have engendered, and placing your heavenly Father before you, as the continual object of your imitation. Deſcend not to the imitation of men whoſe example may controul

your exertions, and reconcile you to ſloth. Never think that you have reached the pinnacle of wiſdom, of virtue or of piety. Set not limits to the good you perform, nor conſider any degree of moral or intellectual improvement beyond your reach. Look upon what you have acquired as only the beginning, the ſeed which ſhould ſpring up, and enable you to reach to much greater degrees of perfection."

Such is the language of religion—She bids us be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. She improves all our faculties, and elevates the ſoul to the contemplation of the moſt glorious truths. She combines in the characters of her friends every thing that is amiable, dignified and glorious. Such we ſhall diſcover that religion to be which we hear ſo frequently condemned by pretenders to knowledge who are loud and vehement in proportion as they are ignorant—Indeed, the calumny that religion debars us from all the enjoyments of life may be taken as a fair ſpecimen of the implacable ſpirits by which unbelievers are actuated againſt her, and although their ſophiſtry and deceit, as in this inſtance, may be eaſily detected, it will be your beſt method never to enter into diſputes with them, which ſeldom produce good. On the contrary you will find it more uſeful when you meet with ſuch perſons to recall to your minds a few of thoſe eminent men who have given the ſtrongeſt proofs of their belief in divine revelation, at the ſame time that they

were the admiration of the world for their virtue, their abilities, and their learning. Out of thousands which have equal claims to notice, for ſince the promulgation of the goſpel, the moſt famous men in every department of art and ſcience have been its adherents, I ſhall ſelect a very few. Not that I conſider the approbation of the moſt diſtinguiſhed men a ſufficient proof of religion; it is only a preſumptive argument. Its truth reſts on principles independent of this aſſent, it is however gratifying to know that the moſt eminent in all ages have been firm believers.

Lord Chatham, that great orator, ſtateſman, and patriot, whoſe vigorous and commanding eloquence enforced thoſe counſels to which Great Britain owed her preeminence, and glory, gives this memorable advice to his nephew, Lord Camelford, then a ſtudent at Cambridge.

"I come now to the part of the advice I have to offer to you, which moſt nearly concerns your welfare, and upon which every good and honorable purpoſe of your life will aſſuredly turn; I mean the keeping up in your heart the true ſentiments of religion. If you are not right towards God, you can never be ſo towards man: the nobleſt ſentiment of the human breaſt is here brought to the teſt. Is gratitude in the number of a man's virtues? If it be, the higheſt benefactor demands the warmeſt returns of gratitude, love, and praiſe: Ingratum qui dixerit omnia dixit. If a man

wants this virtue, where there are infinite obligations to excite and quicken it, he will be likely to want all others towards his fellow creatures, whoſe utmoſt gifts are poor compared to thoſe he daily receives at the hands of his never failing Almighty friend. Remember thy creator in the days of thy youth, is big with the deepeſt wiſdom: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wiſdom; and, an upright heart, that is underſtanding. This is eternally true, whether the wits and rakes of Cambridge allow it or not: nay, I muſt add of this religious wiſdom, 'Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace,' whatever your young gentlemen of pleaſure think. Hold faſt, therefore, by this ſheet anchor of happineſs, Religion, you will often want it in the times of moſt danger; the ſtorms and tempeſts of life. Cheriſh true religion as preciouſly as you will fly with abhorence and contempt ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm. The firſt is the perfection and glory of the human nature; the two laſt the depravation and diſgrace of it. Remember, the eſſence of religion is a heart void of offence towards God, and man; not ſubtle ſpeculative opinions, but an active, vital principle of faith."

Lord Bacon whoſe mind embraced the whole circle of the ſciences, the greateſt of men, and the glory of his country was a ſincere Chriſtian—Sir Iſaac Newton who penetrated the myſteries of nature, was as eminent for his piety, as for his unri-

valled talents. The profound Locke, Milton the firſt of Engliſh Poets, Addiſon the enlightened and amiable writer of the Spectator, Sir William Jones, the friend of humanity, and the moſt illuſtrious of Scholars, were Chriſtians. I might ſelect myriads of diſtinguiſhed Perſons in every age and country, where Chriſtianity was known, and in every department of knowledge, not only divines, but alſo Philoſophers, Poets, Moraliſts and Phyſicians, Stateſmen and Lawyers, men whoſe great talents and extenſive information made them the ornaments of human nature. Not ſatisfied with giving a bare aſſent, they gloried in their religion. They recommended it to others as moſt worthy their regard, the beſt foundation of happineſs in this life, and their conſolation in death.

As then you are anxious to realize the fond hopes of your parents, to become the ſupport, and glory of their age, to repay them for the many hours of uneaſineſs which you have coſt them; As you are ſolicitous to become reſpectable members of ſociety, to taſte the pureſt of all pleaſures, to riſe ſuperior to the ſtorms and misfortunes of this life, to become the favorites of God, and the heirs of immortality, I conjure you to attend to this ſhort view of religion, that you may become her determined friends, and that theſe happy proſpects may never be diſappointed.

To ask if you believe in God, would be to inſult your underſtanding; Gratitude clings to the

glorious truth, and reaſon ſanctions the embrace. The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, the inhabitants of the land and water ſo wonderfully ſuited to their different ſituations, and habits of life, loudly proclaim a firſt cauſe of infinite power and wiſdom. Above all, the admirable form of our bodies, and the aſtoniſhing powers of our minds. Is it credible that this intelligence that dwells within us, which combines, which calculates which mounting above the earth riſes to heaven, or deſcends to hell; which brings the paſt into review before us, penetrates into the future, and forms conceptions of immortality, can have ſprung from chance? And is it credible that it ſhines only for a moment and like a feeble taper is extinguiſhed forever? The conſent of all nature proves the being of a God, and in the belief of his exiſtence, that of religion is included, for as our benefactor we owe him thanks, but to offer up thankſgiving to God is the firſt act of piety.

Religion deſcended from heaven at the creation, and the breaſt of Adam was her firſt temple. Eve too enjoyed her ineſtimable bleſſings. Their notes of praiſe aſcended together to the author of their being; the feathered tribes united their warblings, Eden ſmiled with the bloom of innocence, and Angels hailed the glorious concert. After this happy ſtate of things was deſtroyed, and ſin had deformed the Creation, a ſeries of holy men ſerved as guides to one another, in obſerving the

law of nature, which was the only religion at that time pleaſing in the ſight of God.* Among the poſterity of Abraham, one of theſe holy men, the truths of natural religion remain improved, and uncorrupted to this very day—But this people aſſert that many truths have been revealed to them by God himſelf, beſides what were handed down by their father Abraham, and the proofs they produce are certainly convincing. Nor can it be incredible that God ſhould graciouſly reveal thoſe things to man, which are eſſential to his happineſs, and which he could never diſcover, after bleſſing him with exiſtence, and giving him the Earth for his habitation.

Our youthful fancies, delighted with the ſplendor of Greece and Rome, treat the Jews diſreſpectfully, and forget that this injured people were in poſſeſſion of truths infinitely purer than the moſt learned ſages ever diſcovered, when Rome had no being, and the Athenians lived upon ſhell-fiſh, gathered on the Hellenic ſhore. So completely did ſuperſtition extinguiſh every ſpark of divine knowledge, that had not the Jews been ſeparated from the reſt of mankind, the precious truths of natural religion had been forever loſt. To preſerve theſe ſacred principles they were ſelected, and not for any intrinſic merit of their own. As proofs of their direct communication with God, they mention their deliverance from Egypt, the numerous miracles wrought among

* See Gangauelli's Letters.

them, and the excellence of their law, and confident of their ſtrength, they challenge inveſtigation.

Theſe proofs are moſt genuine, and authentic, but for the law its internal evidence is ſufficient. Read with attention the opinions of ancient ſages, examine the principles of Zoroaſter, the conjectures of Socrates, the ambiguous ſentiments of Plato, loſt in the vaſtneſs of his own conceptions, and Ariſtotle preferring the intellectual to the moral virtues, and extract from all theſe a ſyſtem of morals like that of the Decalogue. Reflect with attention upon this ineſtimable ſummary of moral wiſdom. Tell me what is ſuperfluous, or what is wanting; and ſhew me in all Heathen antiquity a monument of wiſdom with which it can be compared. Here you have concentrated in a ſingle point of view the whole law of nature; and is this no proof of its being revealed? In whoſe poſſeſſion was it found? Not among a people exalted by knowledge or eminent for wiſdom, but among a people inured to ſlavery, and debaſed by oppreſſion, and whoſe maſters were totally unqualified to teach them truths ſo comprehenſive and ſublime.

After the promulgation of the law various revelations were ſtill granted conſiſting chiefly of threatnings, and encouragements. For obedience the Jews were promiſed proſperity, but if diſobedient, they were to become a proverb, an aſtoniſhment and a bye-word among the nations, whitherſoever the Lord ſhould lead them. This latter

prophecy has been moſt remarkably fulfilled on this ſingular nation, and is even now fulfilling. Their deliverer Cyrus is named by one of their prophets, an hundred years before he was born, and the deſtruction of Babylon is foretold in the height of her glory, and while ſhe cruelly triumphed over proſtrate Jeruſalem. The coming of Chriſt is mentioned ſeven Centuries before he appeared, and his birth, death, and ſufferings are all deſcribed as minutely as if they had already happened.

Theſe arguments for the truth of divine revelation drawn from prophecy are moſt convincing; by it God appeals to himſelf, as the great diſpenſer of all moral events. When predictions, therefore, long made are verified in the event, the argument is final, and of equal force to all men, and to all ages.

By the language of the prophets we diſcover that the Jewiſh ſyſtem was only a ſhadow of what was to follow, a preparation for a much more perfect, and general diſpenſation. It was limited in its nature, and not formed for the reception of the whole human race, it was intended for the root of a tree whoſe branches ſhould cover the earth. It was indeed a ſtrong light, and its moral precepts were given to be obeyed forever, but it was not ſufficient to produce worſhippers in ſpirit and in truth. This grand diſtinction was reſerved for the Chriſtian religion, to which every thing eſteemed holy before its publication belongs, and much never before known.

If the Jews, although the keepers of a law written by wiſdom itſelf, were unable to reach thoſe pure and ſublime virtues which ſprang from the miſſion of Chriſt, how much leſs were other nations qualified to offer up a ſanctified worſhip? Among them the law of nature was obliterated, or diſregarded, it poſſeſſed no authority or ſanction. The maſs of the people had little more knowledge of divine things, than the beaſts that periſh. The learned were little better, ſo that, conſidering the ſtate of the world, inſtead of thinking a revelation unneceſſary, we may ſee that to grant it was highly becoming the goodneſs and mercy of God. No perſon believing in a firſt cauſe, can deny the poſſibility of a revelation, if it pleaſe the Supreme Being. Now what could make a revelation neceſſary? Surely man not being able to fulfill the end for which he was created, was a ſufficient cauſe, and that their moral debaſement prevented this hiſtory abundantly proves. The people knew nothing of God or of the worſhip that was agreeable to his nature. They were ſunk in the groſſeſt ſuperſtition and idolatry, and prone to the moſt abominable crimes. What they called religion inſtead of purifying them, made them much more wicked by giving a ſanction to tranſgreſſion. The perfections of God, and his moral government were hid from them under a cloud of darkneſs, which they were unable to penetrate. They had no clear notions of the immortality of the ſoul, or a ſtate of future retribu-

tion. I ſpeak not of the vulgar only, whoſe corruption was horrible, but of their learned Philoſophers, and oracles of wiſdom. In ſuch a ſituation it was ſurely more charitable to ſend a revelation than to give exiſtence, more worthy of the goodneſs of God, and as eaſy to believe in it as in our creation.

The wiſe of antiquity knew their wants and confeſſed them. Socrates deſpairs of making men better, unleſs a teacher ſhould deſcend from heaven. Alas! he was ignorant of divine things, he had no ſanction by which to enforce the practice of thoſe duties which he ſo glorioufly diſcharged. His pupil Plato, beholding the diſorder of this preſent ſtate, thinks nothing is done right but by the particular interpoſition of God. Modern philoſophers are not ſo ingenuous; they ſteal their ſublime notions of ſound morals, and divinity, from thoſe very ſcriptures which they revile. Let me however confeſs with Chriſtian candour, that ſuch are the aberrations of human reaſon, that I think it probable ſome lovers of truth may not be convinced of the truth of the Chriſtian religion, but their number is very ſmall. They are commonly moderate in their pretenſions, and treat that religion with reſpect, which they are not ſo happy as to believe. Such men deſerve our pity, and our prayers, againſt them I do not ſpeak. The greater number prejudge the ſubject without examination; they pretend that all the truths of the

goſpel were known before its promulgation, or that men could have eaſily diſcovered them.

But if religion has not brought them to light, how came we to be ſo much more knowing than the ancients? The writings of Plato, of Ariſtotle, and Cicero, are chiefly worthy of conſultation upon this ſubject. They make ſome mention of the immortality of the ſoul, but how confuſed? They reject the ſuperſtitions of the people, but they are incapable of forming a rational worſhip. Their notions of virtue are ambiguous, and frequently falſe; Ariſtotle believed not the firſt principle of all religion natural and revealed—It is true they ſometimes declaim nobly on particular virtues, but by what obligation do they urge their practice? And what enables us to detect the errors of men ſo wiſe? Certainly, the light of revelation. By minutely comparing the manners of the ancients with the dictates of enlightened reaſon, I might have eaſily ſhown the neceſſity of a revelation ſtill more ſtrongly. But as the lives of men are no proper teſt of the truth or falſhood of principles, of their ignorance or knowledge of what is right, I forbear.

The Jews, with infinitely better opportunities than the Gentiles, became equally corrupted about the time our Saviour appeared. The ſublime principles of the law were covered with innumerable traditions. Ceremony was added to ceremony, till all was ſhadow and no ſubſtance. If the ſtate of the world was ſo deplorable, and if it be admitted on all hands that God could have no other end

in view in creating the world, but the diffuſion of happineſs, it may be allowed that this end had failed, for mankind were ignorant of the things moſt eſſential to their happineſs. How the world fell into this lamentable ſituation we are not now enquiring, but the fact being ſo, we might ask our opponents whether it was more conſiſtent with the nature of God to reſtore his creation to its firſt intention, or to let it remain as it was. If this queſtion be allowed to be juſt, as I think it ſhould, few will ſupport the negative. We aſſert then that the remedy was adminiſtered at the very time, that theſe evils appeared at their height.

When the world was in the diſmal ſituation we have been deſcribing, there was born in Judea a poor man named Jeſus, ſuppoſed to be the ſon of a Carpenter, who, aſſiſted by twelve companions without learning, without education, without the countenance of the powerful, or the approbation of the wiſe, taught a ſyſtem of Theology the moſt ſublime, and of morals the moſt perfect, and which was diſſeminated with a moſt aſtoniſhing rapidity, through all the regions of the Eaſt, in direct oppoſition to the power, the intereſts, the pleaſures, the ambition, the prejudices, and the Philoſophy of the world, in ſpite of princes and prieſts, the force of ſuperſtition, and the fury of blind zeal :—A religion which admits no falſe virtue, however univerſally admired, and omits no true one, though deſpiſed by all the world.

A religion which pays no reſpect to the prejudices of men, throws out no vain allurements to gain proſelytes, and admits no criminal indulgence; but fills us with love and gratitude to God, excites our ardent imitation of the Divine perfections, makes us ſenſible of our natural weakneſs, and dependence, opens our hearts towards all mankind, fills us with ſympathy and benevolence towards them, raiſes our thoughts above the frivolous joys of this life, and preſents us with the moſt glorious proſpects beyond the grave. In every other religion, the good of the preſent life was the firſt object; here it is but the ſecond—They took cognizance of external acts only; it penetrates to the heart, it demands internal purity, and benevolent diſpoſitions. It is a mirror made by the finger of God reflecting in his true character every perſon who looks into it. But to be more particular, let us notice a few of thoſe virtues it recommends, and doctrines it teaches, which were never before known. Humility, the root of all the virtues, though deſpiſed by the world, is here warmly recommended. It deſtroys preſumption and vanity, pride and envying, ambition and rivalſhip, and ſubſtitutes in their place, meekneſs, reſignation, patience under injuries, moderate wiſhes and expectations. To revenge injuries, had always been conſidered to a certain extent, meritorious. It was a mark of ſpirit; to omit doing it was diſgraceful, and while ancient

moraliſts allowed and praiſed it under certain reſtrictions, it is condemned; by Chriſtianity with more than ordinary ſolemnity, for to forgive others is made the expreſs condition of our own forgiveneſs. A third precept is charity, or univerſal benevolence. This is a conſtellation of all the virtues, the teſt of the Chriſtian's obedience, his nobleſt mark of diſtinction, a virtue ſo rational and ſublime, and eminently uſeful, that the general practice of it would baniſh miſery from the earth.

Moreover this religion inculcates ſeveral duties unknown to other religions. One of which is repentance, or a hatred of evil, with a firm reſolution of being wicked no longer—a care to make every poſſible recompence for former tranſgreſſions, and to change our nature and diſpoſition to a conformity with the Goſpel. Love not the world is another duty enjoined, the reaſonableneſs of which is eaſily diſcovered, for worldly things are vain and inſufficient for happineſs; not that we ſhould adopt a miſanthropic ſecluſion from ſociety, but ſuch a diſpoſition of mind as prevents the world from engroſſing the firſt place in our thoughts and affections. This duty is therefore conſiſtent with induſtry, and innocent purſuits. The doctrines of this religion are equally new with its precepts; the reſurrection of the dead, the immortality of the ſoul, the laſt judgment, and the triumph of the righteous.

The character of the illuſtrious founder of this religion is no leſs wonderful than the religion itſelf;

indeed his excellence has never been diſputed. How infinitely beyond that of any other teacher! The mildneſs, the dignity, the ſpotleſs ſanctity of his manners, ſo utterly inconſiſtent with every idea of enthuſiaſm or in poſture: The ſublimity of his doctrines, the conſummate wiſdom, and perfect purity of his moral precepts. What ardent love without the ſmalleſt tincture of ſuperſtition does he expreſs towards God! His devotion is always rational, his obedience cheerful and reſigned. His example gives the moſt full and perfect illuſtration of his precepts. His whole employment is to do good: He is gentle mild and condeſcending. He goes about healing diſeaſes, correcting errors, relieving infirmities, removing prejudices, promoting piety, juſtice, charity, and peace. In return for all this goodneſs, he is treated with contempt, and neglect. He feels the inſults of his enemies, but he never allows reſentment to harbour in his breaſt, all is patience and reſignation, he returns good for evil, kindneſs for inſult; hated and reproached, he pities and bleſſes all his enemies, praying for thoſe that thirſted for his blood. Even at his laſt moments, when ſuffering the moſt excruciating torments upon the croſs, heightened by the ſavage reproach of the ſurrounding barbarians, he feels only compaſſion for them, he cries to his heavenly Father to have mercy upon them.

Jeſus made his ſufferings and death a part of his original plan, and eſſential to its ſucceſs—He foreſaw and declared their neceſſity; neither he nor his

followers derived any temporal advantage, on the contrary, they experienced the moſt cruel treatment. They ſought not, like all other religions, to unite human policy with divine—to blend their religious with their civil power; they deſpiſed, honours, riches and pleaſures. They courted poverty, ignominy and death. What then could ſupport them, if not a conſciouſneſs of the truth? They knew that in this world they ſhould have tribulation, be hated of all nations, and even put to death; nor had they reaſon to expect any bleſſings in the world to come, if they were propagating a lie by the falſe pretences of divine aſſiſtance. Moraliſts univerſally conclude that it is impoſſible for men to act without the appearance of ſome good to be procured by the action, for a love of life, and a deſire of ſelf preſervation, are implanted in our nature; conſequently, we avoid miſery and torments: but Jeſus, and his diſciples could not thus abandon all the bleſſings and expectations of this, and of another world, and willingly ſubject themſelves to all the miſery and torments poſſible to be endured in propagating opinions from which they could expect no profit or advantage, unleſs they were bereft of common ſenſe, had renounced the natural inſtincts of mankind, and were in love with ruin and deſtruction.

We Chriſtians are often unjuſtly accuſed of credulity, but here we retort the charge, and declare, that thoſe who reject our holy religion, ſupported as it is by the teſtimony of Jeſus and his followers

muſt believe things the moſt incredible, and repugnant to human nature. They muſt believe that perſons of the moſt blameleſs lives, and virtuous converſation, ſhould, againſt the cleareſt dictates of their conſcience, ſtand up in defence of a villainous impoſture. That men, whoſe diſcourſes and actions evidently tended to the promotion of true holineſs, ſhould in their hearts defy the Supreme Being, and deteſt all goodneſs—that men who taught doctrines the moſt ſublime, and who were eminent for their wiſdom, as appears by their precepts and writings, ſhould be infinitely more zealous in maintaining and diſperſing a lie, than men have ever been in confirming the truth. Our opponents muſt farther believe, that a few feeble men, without any viſible aſſiſtance, changed the face of the world; that their weakneſs overcame the greateſt ſtrength; that their ſimplicity baffled the ſharpeſt wit, the ſubtleſt policy, and the deepeſt learning; that a ruſtic eloquence equally void of ornament, of erudition, or of ſtrength—forced men, contrary to the truth, though ſupported by the moſt brilliant eloquence, to believe a ſtory unpleaſant and diſgraceful; and that all this was done by men united by fraud, without intereſt, virtue or truth. Laſtly, they muſt believe that after the death of Jeſus, his diſciples without and viſible advantage or future hopes, ſupported his doctrine, patiently endured all that is diſtaſteful to human nature, and ſacrificed their fortunes, their reputation, and every thing that was dear to them,

to the ghoſt of a falſe prophet, and condemned malefactor. If the enemies of the goſpel can digeſt all this, why doth philoſophy inform us that ſelf preſervation, and the love of life, are laws of our nature, and that it is not poſſible for any man deliberately to chooſe to be miſerable, or refuſe to be happy, or not to deſire to be ſo. Theſe philoſophcal principles muſt be given up, or they muſt believe.*

The hiſtory of the chriſtian religion is its ſtrongeſt proof. It ſhews it to be the perfection of natural religion, as natural religion is the perfection of reaſon. Little are they acquainted with it who imagine that it contracts our views, while philoſophy extends them. The very contrary is the truth, it gives a boundleſs range to all the faculties of the ſoul, while Philoſophy limits them extremely. To the mere Philoſopher, the world is every thing; to the Chriſtian nothing; the former regards as his happineſs, his end; the latter, an atom, a ſhadow which paſſeth away. Religion is a golden chain, the firſt link of which is the Supreme Being, and which reacheth to eternity. Without its illuminating ray this world is a riddle, an inexplicable chaos, which bewilders us the more, the deeper we enquire.

The very object of this religion is new, it is not confined to the preſent life, it points to a future ſtate of exiſtence, as the goal to which we ſhould direct our ſteps. This is the crown for which we are to contend—the cement that unites all our

* See Whitby.

actions closely together, prevents any thing from being foreign or indifferent; takes cognizance of the smallest as well as the greatest actions of our lives; and comprehends every thought, word and action. How glorious the object set before us—Take away a future state, and our lives are broken and unconnected, variable and uncertain. This explains and completes them. They no longer appear insulated occurrences, a few brilliant transactions, by which we particularize certain days and years, while all our other actions are consigned to oblivion. All mankind are moving forward, willing, and unwilling; some groping their way in the dark, others measuing their steps in the twilight; but the sincere Christian walks with a firm pace in the light of the Sun. How sublime to know, and by this religion only is it known, that man shall never die, that more than 800 millions of mortals are daily pressing forward to the tribunal of Christ, the wicked with tottering steps, through the mist of vice; the heathen by the faint glimmerings of the law of nature; while the Christian already sees his judge, and patiently waits his turn to be called.

Already have we challenged any system of morals among the ancients equal to the Decalogue; how much more may this challenge be repeated when speaking of Christ's sermon on the mount, and his comprehensive, and sublime, yet concise prayer to his Father. But what part of the Gospel contains not superior excellences, more origin-

ality, and greater ſimplicity, than the books of the ſages of former times. Let me requeſt you to peruſe with attention thoſe ineſtimable books that contain our religion: in them you will find no appearance of artifice or of party ſpirit; no attempts to exaggerate on the one hand, or depreciate on the other; no objections anticipated. The writers honeſtly record their own miſtakes, as well as the other particulars, of their ſtory. But a ſingle peruſal will ſhew their excellence much better than any thing I can ſay in their favor.

Be not ſatisfied with this faint and imperfect sketch of this rational and ſublime religion, which addreſſes itſelf to all orders of men, and makes the peaſant better acquainted with the nature of the Supreme Being, and the relation we bear towards him than the moſt renowned worthies of ancient time; a religion frequently neglected by the proud, becauſe preached to the poor, and hated by men who would have been its moſt paſſionate admirers, had it been wrapped up in a ſyſtem, and ſolicited the attention of the learned alone. What is one of its greateſt perfections they diſlike; but it is no reſpecter of perſons, it enlightens the low as well as the high; breaks down the barrier between the philoſopher and the peaſant, and tells them both what they ought to do. It tells us to love, to worſhip, and obey God, and to be inſpired with the noble emulation of imitating his divine perfections, ſubmitting ourſelves with patience,

cheerfulneſs, and reſignation, to the viciſitudes of the preſent life. With the love of God it deſires us join the love of man, that univerſal charity, which is the foundation of all the comforts of ſocial life, the bond of connexion between earth, and heaven. This angelic diſpoſition ſoftens our paſſions, appeaſes our reſentments, extends our beneficence to the miſeries of mankind—it tells us we are all brethren, all children of the ſame father, and urges us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, be a Father to the Fatherleſs, a huſband to the widow, the orphan's ſtay, and the ſtranger's ſhield; that it is our glory to be clothed with gentleneſs, humility, brotherly kindneſs, moderation, and equity. It tells us to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world, excites our warmeſt gratitude to God for his unſpeakable kindneſs; exalts us to the conſideration of everlaſting juſtice, and moral excellence, to an heavenly connection with the ſpiritual world. Is not this a religion worthy of our Saviour to promulgate, and of rational beings to embrace? Beings fitted by their nature to attain a perfection at preſent inconceivable—who are called on here to prepare for happineſs in another ſtate exceeding their limited conceptions, always increaſing through the immenſity of ages; to them indeed having a beginning, but which ſhall never have an end.